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RECENT TRENDS IN PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR UNIONS

by

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Abstract

This paper examines trends in public support for unionism during the 1980s. Comparing data from two western Canadian cities in 1981 and 1987, we examine the impact of the recession of the early 1980s on public perceptions of the role of unions; whether the city differences documented in 1981 had increased or decreased by 1987; and if 'hard times' had resulted in more non-union employees expressing a willingness to joining a union. We find little evidence of growing support for negative "big labour" opinions about unions in the two cities. Despite a well-publicized labour dispute involving the use of strikebreakers in one city, there was no increase in support for legislation restricting the practice. However, residents in the same city were significantly more likely to agree with "business unionism" sentiments, an opinion trend accompanied by a growing willingness to join a union.

INTRODUCTION

The 1980s in Canada have been a time of dramatic social, economic and political change. High unemployment and widespread job instability characterized the first years of the decade and still affect some regions of the country. Labour market competition increased and employers in both the private and public sectors laid off workers. Collective bargaining suffered a number of setbacks. These developments must be viewed against a changing political landscape characterized by a movement to the right in the 1984 federal election and in several provinces.

Of central interest to industrial relations scholars is how these changes have been reflected in public opinion about unions. Unions are the major institutions championing the interests of employees, so we might expect growing support for organized labour as workers' economic circumstances deterioriate. Alternatively, goverment-imposed curbs on industrial relations, concession bargaining, two-tiered wage agreements, and employers' union avoidance tactics during the 1980s threaten to erode union power (see, for example, Panitch and Swartz, 1985; Milton, 1986; Kochan, McKersie and Chalykoff, 1986). A more hostile climate for unions might also diminish their perceived usefulness as a means for improving wages and working conditions -- especially within the context of relatively high unemployment.

These questions frame the analyses of public opinion towards unions presented in this paper. The authors' previous research on union attitudes (Krahn and Lowe, 1984a; 1984b), based on 1981 survey data from the western Canadian cities of Edmonton and Winnipeg, is replicated and extended with 1987 data. The original study went beyond individual explanations of union attitudes by documenting the impact of community, and demonstrated that pro-union sentiments vary depending on the attitudinal dimension being studied. Public opinion in this regard is rather contradictory: instrumental beliefs about unions are prominent, as are views that unions are overly powerful and contribute to economic problems. Analysis of the 1981 data also found a relatively high degree of latent unionism, with 40% of sample members indicating that they would join a union if one existed in their workplace.

This paper addresses three general questions: First, have the social and economic changes associated with the recession of the early 1980s, and the industrial and labour market restructuring it

precipitated, affected how people perceive the role of unions in society? Second, given that we found significant inter-city differences in union attitudes in 1981 (Krahn and Lowe, 1984a), has the differential impact of subsequent economic events in Edmonton and Winnipeg brought further divergence or, alternatively, a convergence in union attitudes? Third, have 'hard times' increased or decreased the propensity of non-union employees to consider joining a union?

RECENT RESEARCH ON PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR UNIONS

There is a growing literature on public attitudes towards unions, as well as on the related issue of willingness to join. [1] While some of the studies in this area have discussed changing public opinion, systematic longitudinal research on the topic is lacking. Hence, our comparative perspective on attitudes towards unions and willingness to join in two communities at two time points can begin to shed light on emergent patterns of labour relations and, more broadly, the changing role of unions in society.

Public opinion polls inform most discussions of trends in union attitudes. But while they allow for time-series analyses, such polls generally lack the range of independent variables needed to explain observed shifts in support for unionism. Furthermore, we must remember that public opinion poll findings are really only "aggregates of private views" (Roiser and Little, 1986:271). These views may be superficial and mainly for conversational purposes, and therefore may be weak predictors of behaviour. More deeply held individual beliefs, or genuine group consensus, may crystalize only when the consequences of such beliefs become immediate, as in a strike vote. It is also likely that currently topical issues, such as prominent industrial disputes, are mirrored in people's opinions. In addition, an individual's beliefs may be both favourable and unfavourable to unions depending on which aspect is questioned (Furnham, 1984:422-5). A brief review of opinion poll findings does, nonetheless, raise some interesting questions about the changing nature of public attitudes toward unions.

Public beliefs about unions must be located within their larger context. In Canada, and especially in the U.S., all major social institutions appear to be facing a 'crisis of confidence'

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[1]For reviews of research on public opinion and unions, see Krahn and Lowe, 1984a, 1984b; McShane, 1986; Johnston, 1986; Lipset, 1986; Roiser and Little, 1986; on union voting intentions see Fiorito and Greer, 1986; Heneman and Sandver, 1983; Block and Premack, 1983. Klandermans (1986) reviews the research on union joining.

(Johnston, 1986:67). Recent Canadian data show that labour unions receive the lowest confidence scores of 20 institutions -- below multinational corporations, the tobacco industry, and oil companies -- although the absolute differences among the 20 are not substantial (Johnston, 1986:55-9). Generally, opinion poll data show Canadians to be preoccupied with job and income security, which suggests a strong commitment to their present work. Unions are held in low esteem; governments, not unions, are looked upon as the best means for addressing job concerns (Johnston, 1986: 145).

However, public opinion appears to be sensitive to current socio-political and economic changes. Decima's national quarterly polls conducted between the summers of 1981 and 1982, just as the recession was taking hold, demonstrate how public opinion can change (Johnston, 1986:161-7). Respondents were presented with a forced-choice question that contrasted unions as too powerful, or necessary to protect workers from exploitation. In 1981, the split on these choices was 52% versus 40%; in 1982 it was 61% versus 31%. Interestingly, the same polls show a smaller proportion supporting more government control over labour unions in 1982 (57%) than a year earlier (67%). Thus as confidence in all institutions drops, so does support for government controls over unions.

Despite current evidence of their unpopularity, Johnston (1986:166,187) suggests that unions may be no less popular now than in the past. Other analysts disagree, arguing that attitudes toward unions are becoming less favourable. Riddell (1986:5), for instance, examines Gallup poll responses to the standard question about whether unions are a good thing or a bad thing for the country. Comparing responses in 1950-8 with 1976-82, 12-20% answered bad and 60-69% good, compared with 30-42% bad and 42-54% good in the latter period.

Trends in American public opinion about unions are similar. Consistent with their views on government and large corporations, Americans today are ambivalent toward unions, approving of their functions, but disapproving of their behaviour (Lipset 1986:288). Most Americans believe that without unions, workers would have worse pay and working conditions. Specifically, a majority of respondents answered 'approve' to the Gallup poll question "do you approve or disapprove of labour unions?" in 23 surveys between 1936 and 1985. A majority supported statements such as: strong unions are the only way for workers to get a fair shake in big companies today; unions are in the best interests of working people; and most workers need unions to protect their rights. Yet at the same

time, the American public sees unions as too powerful, self-interested, and led by corrupt and autocratic individuals.

It is indeed remarkable that willingness to join unions in the U.S. does not seem to have diminished (Lipset, 1986:302-3) in the face of a right-ward political shift and the declining influence of unions. A Harris poll in June 1985 asked a national sample of employed adults "if an election were held tomorrow to decide whether your workplace should be unionized or not, do you think you would definitely/probably vote for a union or probably/definitely vote against a union?" Overall, 34% said yes (12% definitely, 22% probably) and 63% said no (39% definitely, 24% probably). This potential support for unions is similar to levels found in the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey and the 1980 National Longitudinal Surveys.

There is also an ambivalence in British public opinion toward unions. Response to the Gallup poll question about unions being a good or bad thing for the country varied little between 1971-81 (Roiser and Little, 1986:262). The proportion of respondents saying that unions are good ranged from 51% to 61%. In the same period, 85% to 91% viewed unions as essential to protect workers' interests. However, about 70% thought they were too powerful. Roiser and Little suggest that British public attitudes are contradictory, but generally stable over time, although during labour disruptions, such as the 1984-85 national miners' strike, opinion quickly turns against unions. Their conclusion is that the British opinion polls refute the impression that unions have become less popular over the last 20 years (Roiser and Little, 1986:271).

While these poll results highlight some recurring patterns, they fail to clearly identify patterns of change in public support for unions. Although union attitudes appear to shift during periods of labour militancy, we know little about the political and economic determinants of such attitudes. The importance of the socio-economic environment on individuals' work-related attitudes (see, for example, Gallie, 1978; Lash, 1984) is reason enough to pursue comparative research on public opinion and trade unions. But despite ready access to poll results from Britain, Canada and the U.S., cross-national research is virtually non-existent. [2] In fact, there have only been a few studies of

[2] Lipset's (1987) general discussion of unionization trends in Canada and the U.S. is a good step in this direction.

attitudes towards unions outside of the U.S.[3]

Academic studies of union attitudes and the propensity to join unions are seldom longitudinal (Klandermans, 1986:192). Most focus on specific occupational groups or work organizations rather than a cross-section of the public, relying on data from the 1970s. For instance, the bench-mark study by Kochan (1979) uses The 1977 Quality of Employment Survey, as do many subsequent studies. The academic literature thus does not advance our understanding of how, and to what degree, attitudes toward unions may be changing in the 1980s. Furthermore, we know little about the composition, distribution and determinants of pro-union beliefs (Block and Premack, 1983:64; Hills, 1985:192; Fiorito, 1987).

Neither national opinion polls nor more focused academic studies address the question of how changes in the local labour market and economy can affect an individual's orientation toward unions. Community studies might allow us to test the intuitively appealing hypothesis that a person's response to unions would be rooted in their immediate socio-economic environment. Focusing on communities is a useful way of controlling to some degree the multitude of environmental influences shaping people's beliefs about unionism. Generally speaking, however, a community-level approach is not well developed in industrial relations research. [4] The present study therefore attempts to demonstrate the value of a community focus by comparing public opinion toward unions and willingness to join in 1987 in the cities of Edmonton and Winnipeg, and by contrasting these findings to those from our studies (Krahn and Lowe, 1984a, 1984b) of the same two communities six years earlier during better economic times.

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[3] See McShane, 1986; Krahn and Lowe, 1984a, 1984b; Richards and Mauser, 1986 for Canadian studies; Furnham, 1984, for British evidence; Davis, 1979, for an Australian study.

[4] The few exceptions include Richards and Mauser's (1986) survey of attitudes towards unions in Vancouver; studies of union sentiments and support for union membership in a Georgia and a North Carolina textile town (McDonald and Clelland, 1984; Schuiman, Zingraff and Reif, 1985); and Davis's (1979) study of attitudes towards unions in Melbourne, Australia.

THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT

High oil prices during the 1970s fuelled rapid economic expansion in Alberta. Consequently, Edmonton experienced one of the fastest growth rates of any Canadian city during the decade and in the first few years of the 1980s. The nation-wide recession of 1981-82 and declining oil prices in the international market quickly ended Alberta's energy boom (Nikiforuk, Pratt and Wanagas, 1987). Economic and population growth declined sharply in Edmonton. By comparison, Winnipeg's economic performance and population growth were much less volatile thoughout this time. Thus, while Edmonton experienced rapid growth a decade ago, both cities experienced modest population growth between 1981 and 1986, slightly below the 6.2% increase for all large Canadian cities (Burke, 1987). The 1986 Canadian census reported Edmonton's population to be 698,413, while Winnipeg's stood at 625,304 (Statistics Canada, 1986a; 1986b).

Like most Canadian metropolitan centres, Edmonton and Winnipeg have economies dominated by service industries. At the time of our 1987 survey, about 73% of the labour force in both cities was employed in the service sector (Statistics Canada, 1987a). Among the remaining 27%, Winnipeg had a slightly higher percentage in the manufacturing sector, while Edmonton had somewhat larger construction and natural-resource based industries. We should also note that because both cities are provincial capitals, they have relatively large public sectors. Beyond these similarities, there are some important differences in labour force characteristics (see Statistics Canada, 1987a). Edmonton's labour force participation rate is higher, 71.9% compared with 66.6% in Winnipeg. More importantly, in February 1987, Edmonton had an unemployment rate of 12.9%. This was substantially higher than Winnipeg's 7.5% and above the national average of 10.5%. In absolute terms, Edmonton had over twice the number of unemployed individuals as did Winnipeg (52,000 compared to 25,000).

It is difficult to obtain current unionization data at the city level. In 1984 (the most recent data available), Edmonton had somewhat more union members -- 109,838 compared with 106,887 in Winnipeg (Statistics Canada , 1987b) -- but since Winnipeg also had a slightly smaller labour force its unionization rate was actually higher. [5] In terms of person days not worked due to strikes and lockouts, the data also do not reveal any clear difference between the cities. In 1981 Edmonton

[5]Using labour force data (Statistics Canada, 1985:93) we calculate 1984 union density at 27.6% for Edmonton and 34.1% for Winnipeg.

registered more days lost in this regard; in 1985 (the most recent data) the situation was reversed (Labour Canada, 1985).

There can be little doubt, however, that the 1986 Gainers strike in Edmonton was a conflict of major proportions that could have had an impact on public opinion in that city. Workers in the Gainers meat-packing plant refused to accept a wage roll-back which management insisted was necessary to keep the plant competitive. Members of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union remained on strike for over six months, during which time many unemployed residents of the city were hired as replacement workers. Management promised strikebreakers permanent jobs before any of the strikers were taken back, although this did not occur. Union members and sympathizers clashed with police required to escort replacement workers across the picket line and to enforce court injunctions restricting picketing. This violence, and the resulting arrests, attracted widespread media attention. The Alberta Federation of Labour, church groups, the opposition New Democratic Party, and many residents of the city became actively involved in a boycott of Gainers' products and pressured the government to intervene in the dispute (Nikiforuk, 1987). Winnipeg residents, in constrast, did not experience a local management-labour dispute of this scale at any time during the 1980s.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

A number of research questions and hypotheses are suggested by our overview of union attitudes research and the changing economic and labour-relations climate in the city of Edmonton. First, has there been a change in pro-union sentiments in the two cities since 1981? Results from recent public opinion polls in Canada suggest that support for unions is waning. The academic literature, while not based on recent data, also would lead us to predict growing endorsement of the negative 'big labour' image of unions, but little change in the perceived economic benefits of unions for their members.

Second, American evidence indicates that the level of support for union joining among non-union employees has remained fairly constant between 1977 and 1985 (Lipset, 1986:302-3). How might 'latent unionism' in Canada have been affected by deteriorating labour market conditions and a changing political climate?

Our third question looks more closely at the local economic and political environment, attempting to detect different patterns of change in union attitudes in these two cities. Edmonton's continuing high unemployment rate, its economic decline, the sweep of city ridings by the left-wing New Democratic Party in the 1986 provincial election, and several high-profile labour disputes point in the direction of greater union support in 1987. The absence of similar changes in Winnipeg would suggest more stable public opinion over time in that city. In short, the primary explanation we presented for relatively weaker support for the 'business unionism' image (recognition of the instrumental role of unions) in Edmonton in 1981 -- a buoyant local economy -- has disappeared. Since Edmonton has experienced more changes likely to bolster union support than has Winnipeg, do we find a convergence in opinions and in willingness to join in the two cities?

The fourth research question focuses on strikebreaking, raising the issue of workers' collective rights (see Johnston and Ornstein, 1985:375). Employers' use of strikebreakers remains a highly contentious point in Canada (see Krahn and Lowe, 1988, ch. 7). Only one Canadian province, Quebec, has reasonably effective laws against strikebreaking. Against the backdrop of the 1986 Gainers strike in Edmonton, residents in that city may have become more supportive of anti-strikebreaking legislation than they were in 1981, and in comparison with Winnipeg residents who were not exposed to the intensive media coverage of the Gainers dispute. Alternatively, media coverage of union members being arrested by police could have convinced some Edmontonians that unions need to be further controlled by government. In short, then, has there been any change over time and between cities in public opinion about legislation limiting the use of strikebreakers?

RESEARCH METHODS AND MEASUREMENT

The Edmonton data come from the 11th annual Edmonton Area Study conducted in 1987 by the Population Research Laboratory (PRL) at the University of Alberta. The sample was randomly selected from the population of households listed in the 1986 municipal census. A total of 620 addresses were chosen, introductory letters explaining the study were mailed to these households, and then an interviewer was sent to the address to try to obtain an interview. A modified quota sampling technique, necessary to maintain a relatively equal female-male ratio in the sample, was used to select a respondent within the designated household The final completed sample contained 454 respondents,

reflecting a response rate of 76.3%. Refusals accounted for 18.3% of the original sample, 4.4% of the households could not be contacted, and a few interviews (1%) could not be completed because of language problems (see Kinzel, 1987, for more details).

Winnipeg data were collected as part of the 5th annual Winnipeg Area Study (WAS) carried out by the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba. A random sample of 742 addresses was selected from the City of Winnipeg 1986 tax assessment file, and reverse directories were then used to obtain telephone numbers for these households. Telephone interviews were conducted if the household had a listed telephone; if not, an interviewer attempted to obtain an in-person interview (83% of the interviews were completed by telephone). Interviewers were instructed in advance as to whether they should choose a female or a male respondent in a specific household. A final response rate of 78% produced a sample of 581. Refusals accounted for an additional 19% of the original sample (see Currie, 1987, for more details).

The questions addressed in the WAS did not, in most cases, replicate the questions asked in the EAS. However, several equivalent measures of union attitudes and willingness to join a union were asked in each location. In addition, the EAS and WAS have made an effort, over the years, to include standard measures of a considerable range of demographic and socio-economic measures. Hence, with a few exceptions, similarly worded independent variables were available in both studies. The Edmonton and Winnipeg data were merged into one file (N = 1035) for the analyses reported in this paper.

Five of the attutudinal measures used in our 1981 study (Krahn and Lowe, 1984a, 1984b) were replicated in the 1987 studies: 1) "We need more laws to limit the power of unions"; 2) "Unions impose too many restrictions on employers"; 3) "During a strike, management should be prohibited from hiring workers to take the place of strikers"; 4) "Employees in an organization have better working conditions when all of them belong to a union"; 5) "The selfishness of employers can only be fought by strong unions". As in 1981, responses in Edmonton were recorded on a 7-point 'stongly agree - strongly disagree' Likert scale, whereas Winnpeg used a 5-point scale in 1987. [4]

[4]The Edmonton data were recoded into a 5-point scale, by combining values of 1 and 2 and values of 6 and 7, when the data sets were merged.

Four of the items -- "big labour" (items 1 and 2) and "business unionism" (items 4 and 5) -- were chosen for replication because they represented the two major dimensions of union attitudes identified in previous research, including our own (Krahn and Lowe, 1984a, 1984b). [7] This configuration of attitudes reflects the negative effects of union power and the economic benefits derived from union membership. Other research (McShane, 1986) also indicates that individuals can hold different, even contradictory, images of unions depending on which goals, strategies and effects are being addressed. [8] The strikebreaking issue is more specific than the two general attitudes just noted. Our measure of support for anti-strikebreaking legislation taps possible changes in attitudes precipitated by the 1986 Gainers strike in Edmonton.

A binary variable was used to distinguish Edmonton and Winnipeg sample members. Since differences in public opinion between the two cities could be a function of differences in the characteristics of sample members, rather than because of changes in the economic and political climate, a variety of individual-level control variables were used in our multi-variate analyses of union attitudes and willingness to join. Age, gender, education level, total individual and household income in 1986 (both coded as low, medium and high), and a binary measure for home ownership constituted a set of demographic and socio-economic status measures. Binary variables for current labour force participation, unemployment, and union membership, along with similar measures of managerial/professional occupations and clerical/sales/service occupations identified work-related statuses. Political orientations were indexed with three binary measures of current (provincial) preference for the Progressive Conservative, New Democratic, and Liberal parties. A pair of questions about current financial status compared to a year earlier, and to a year in the future, were used to measure respondents' feelings of economic security and optimism.

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[7] The correlation between the two "big labour" items in the 1987 Edmonton sample was 0.55 compared to 0.42 in the Winnipeg sample. Correlations of 0.42 and 0.37 reflected the relationship between the two "business unionism" measures in the 1987 Edmonton and Winnipeg samples, respectively.

[8] See Fiorito (1987:277-9) for further discussion of the "big labour" attitudinal dimension.

RESULTS

Table I displays the percentage of the Winnipeg and Edmonton samples agreeing with each of the five union attitude measures in 1981 and 1987. In both cities, support for laws limiting the power of unions declined somewhat, although a slight majority continued to agree with this sentiment. [9] Roughly half of the 1987 sample members in each city also agreed that "unions impose too many restrictions on employers." Winnipeg results from 1981 and 1987 were almost identical, and the relatively small increase over time in Edmonton (from 50.7% to 55.5%) was not statistically significant. In short, despite pronouncements that public support for unions is declining, we find little evidence of a substantial increase in the belief that unions are too powerful. While there is a small (non-significant) increase in agreement with the "unions restricting employers" belief in Edmonton, both cities registered a drop in the percentage calling for more government controls on unions. [10]

These comparisons over time and between communities also force us to reject the hypothesis that intense media attention on picket-line violence precipitated by the use of strike-breakers led to increased support for anti-strikebreaking legislation in Edmonton. While there is somewhat more agreement in Edmonton than in Winnipeg in 1987, both cities experienced a small non-significant drop in support for such legislation. Less than one-half of the sample members in each community seem to favour the type of legislation now in place in the province of Quebec.

Edmonton residents in 1987 were significantly more likely than their counterparts in 1981 to agree that unions provide their members better wages and working conditions. Alternatively, a smaller percentage of Winnipeg residents in 1987 (53.2%) compared to 1981 (61.0%) agreed with this statement. This reversal is one of our most interesting findings. It shows Edmonton residents more -- not less -- inclined than Winnipeg respondents to agree with this "business unionism" sentiment. The second measure of business unionism does not show the same pattern of change. In both cities,

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[9]While both cities show a drop of about five percentage points, the slightly larger change in Edmonton translates into a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) while the Winnipeg change over time does not.

[10]Rather than taking this decline as evidence of growing support for unions, following Johnston (1986:67), one could interpret it a loss of public confidence in governments' ability to legislate effectively. The 1987 Edmonton study included an additional item (omitted in Winnipeg) which stated: "We need more laws to limit the power of employers in dealing with unions." Only 37.6% of the Edmonton respondents agreed, suggesting that support for laws limiting unions is still stronger than support for laws limiting employers.

TABLE I: Union attitudes in Edmonton and Winnipeg, 1981 and 1987. #

	% Agree @			
	Edmonton		Winnipeg	
	1981	1987	1981	1987
We need more laws to limit the power of unions.	57.9 *	52.2	56.3	50.8
Unions impose too many restrictions on employers.	50.7	55.5	49.8	49.4 +
During a strike, management should be prohibited from hiring workers to take the place of strikers.	50.9	45.8	47.3	41.8
Employees of an organization have better wages and working conditions when all of them belong to a union.	50.9 *	56.8	61.0 * +	53.2
The selfishness of employers can only be fought by strong unions.	40.0	37.4	51.3 * +	31.2 +
[N]	[400]	[454]	[336]	[581]

1987 interviews in Winnipeg were done by telephone; all other data collected through in-person interviews.

@ Percentages calculated with total sample (non-response included) as the base. In 1981, respondents answered on a scale of (1) Strongly disagree - Strongly Agree (7); responses of 5, 6, and 7 are included in "% agree". The same applies to the 1987 Edmonton results, whereas 1987 Winnipeg respondents answered on a 5-point scale (scores of 4 and 5 are included in "% agree".)

* Differences over time are statistically significant ($p < .05$; one-tailed test).

+ Differences between cities (in 1981 or 1987) are statistically significant ($p < .05$; one-tailed test).

support declined for the view that the selfishness of employers can only be fought by strong unions. However, the drop in Winnipeg was much larger, leaving 1987 Edmonton residents significantly more likely to agree with this opinion. Thus, at least at this bivariate level of analysis, the changing economic and political climate in Edmonton may have led to a convergence in "business unionism" beliefs. In fact, these beliefs are more pronounced in Edmonton than in Winnipeg in 1987, a reversal of the situation six years earlier.

In sum, while "big labour" sentiments and support for anti-strikebreaking legislation have not changed as much, we can detect shifts in "business unionism" beliefs in these two communities. This lends support to our argument that economic decline, political realignment, and highly publicized labour-management disputes have fostered greater pro-union sentiments among Edmontonians. Table II examines to what extent this growing pro-unionism has been accompanied by a parallel increase in willingness to join a union.

In 1981, 35% of Edmonton respondents not belonging to a union or a professional association said they would be willing to join a union, compared to 45% of the Winnipeg sample. In the 1981 study, the minority who answered "yes, if I had to" were coded with the less hesitant positive responses. In 1987, they were kept as a separate category. Ignoring this group, we find slightly more of the Edmonton sample (38%) than the Winnipeg sample (35.7%) answering "yes" in 1987. When the "if I had to" group is added to those answering in the affirmative, 56.0% of the non-union 1987 Edmonton labour force participants would be willing to join, compared to 48.1% of the equivalent Winnipeg population. Again, we find evidence of a reversal in union receptivity in these two cities. Since our earlier analyses showed relatively little change in "big labour" beliefs, we can speculate that growing commitment to "business unionism" sentiments in Edmonton may be be associated with the rise in latent unionism.

In order to examine the impact of other variables on the several types of union attitudes discussed above, a "big labour" index was formed by averaging responses to the first two statements in Table I. Similarly, responses to the last two statements in this table were averaged to create a "business unionism" index. Table III contains the results of a series of multiple regression analyses used to identify the main predictors of these indices as well as of the "anti-strikebreaking legislation"

Table II: Willingness to join a union in Edmonton and Winnipeg, 1981 and 1987. #

Willing to join?	Edmonton		Winnipeg	
	1981	1987	1981	1987
Yes	35.0%	38.0%	45.0%	35.7%
Yes, if compulsory @	---	18.0	---	12.4
Total Yes	35.0	56.0	45.0	48.1
No	65.0	44.0	55.0	51.9
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
[N]	[147]	[166]	[95]	[185]

\# Labour force members (full-time and part-time workers, and the unemployed) not currently a member of a union or a professional association.

@ Answer was volunteered by respondent (not suggested by the interviewer); in 1981, such answers were coded as "yes".

measure. All of the independent variables discussed above were used in initial multiple regression equations for each of the three dependent variables. Non-significant predictors were dropped, one or two at a time, from these equations until only variables with statistically significant net effects remained in the trimmed equations. The only exception to this procedure was the retaining of the binary city variable in each equation to test for a community effect.

These multi-variate results confirm our earlier bivariate findings with respect to city differences in union attitudes. Only in the "business unionism" equation do we observe a significant effect of city, controlling on other variables in the equation (beta = .127), such that Edmonton respondents are more in agreement. Interestingly, our 1981 study found the opposite: Winnipeg residents were significantly more likely than Edmonton residents (controlling on other individual-level variables in the equation) to agree with statements about unions improving the wages and working conditions of their members.

Other multi-variate results shown in this table parallel our earlier study, however. In particular, we are unable to account for large amounts of variance in these union attitudes with the independent variables at our disposal. Union members are, as expected, more likely to disagree with "big labour" statements and more likely to agree with the other two types of union attitude. An equally systematic pattern is that of New Democratic party (left-wing) supporters also being more supportive of unions, with those respondents favouring the Progressive Conservative party (right-wing) being less supportive of unions or of legislation restricting strikebreaking. While age and education have small effects on the "big labour" index (older and less educated respondents are more likely to agree), demographic predictors are of little consequence in these analyses. Personal income is positively associated with beliefs about overly-powerful unions and negatively associated with "business unionism" opinions. In short, the affluent are somewhat less supportive of unions. All of the other independent variables tested in these analyses failed to show a significant net effect on any of the three dependent variables.

Finally, the first part of Table IV reports the results of a similar multiple regression analysis of the determinants of willingness to join a union among labour force participants who do not already belong to a union or professional association. Age has a small, but significant, negative net effect on

Table III: Union attitudes: trimmed multiple regression equations * for "big labour" and "business unionism" indices, and "prohibit strike-breakers" measure; Edmonton and Winnipeg combined.

A. Dependent variable: Big Labour index

Independent variable	Beta	b	st. error	T	r @
Edmonton resident (yes = 1)	.025	.050	.067	0.76 *	.058
Union member	-.180	-.502	.091	-5.49	-.190
Age	.079	.005	.002	2.36	.119
Education (more than high school = 1)	-.102	-.208	.068	-3.03	-.098
Respondent's 1986 income	.106	.163	.051	3.18	.086
Vote NDP provincially	-.204	-.472	.081	-5.86	-.241
Vote PC provincially	.089	.208	.082	2.53	.189
[Constant]		3.102			

N = 839 Adjusted R2 = .124

B. Dependent variable: Business Unionism index

Edmonton resident (yes = 1)	.127	.249	.065	3.86	.082
Union member	.187	.499	.088	5.71	.189
Respondent's 1986 income	-.147	-.216	.049	-4.40	-.133
Vote NDP provincially	.146	.325	.078	4.16	.186
Vote PC provincially	-.091	-.203	.080	-2.54	-.149
[Constant]		3.227			

N = 845 Adjusted R2 = .103

C. Dep. variable: "During a strike, management should be prohibited from hiring replacement workers to take the place of strikers."

Edmonton resident (yes = 1)	.050	.136	.085	1.60 *	.018
Union member	.188	.720	.117	6.14	.204
Vote NDP provincially	.087	.275	.102	2.69	.152
Vote PC provincially	-.148	-.468	.104	-4.52	-.180
[Constant]		2.944			

N = 999 Adjusted R2 = .075

* Other independent variables used in regression analyses, and then dropped from the equations because of non-significant net effects, are discussed in the text.

* Partial regression coefficient is NOT statistically significant ($p > .01$); all other effects are significant at the .01 level.

@ Zero-order correlation; pair-wise deletion of missing cases (unlike regression results where list-wise deletion was used)

willingness to join. The more educated sample members, and those currently unemployed are more likely to say they would join, while Progressive Conservative supporters and those in managerial/professional occupations are less likely to admit to this. City of residence does not have a significant effect in this equation which accounts for a relatively small amount of the variation in willingness to join (11%).

While not exactly repeating the pattern observed in Table III, these predictors of latent unionism resemble the variables which were of some importance in the analysis of the various types of union attitudes. This suggests, of course, that if these union attitudes were added to this multiple regression equation, their effects on the self-reported measure of willingness to join would overwhelm the effects of the demographic, work-related, and political preference variables already in the equation. The second half of Tabie IV contains the results of such an analysis.

The combination of union attitudes and other (previously significant) independent variables accounts for 37% of the variation in willingness to join a union. Both the "big labour" and the "business unionism" indices have significant net effects, although the impact of the former (beta = -.256) is relatively less than that of the latter (beta = .419). This is in line with our earlier observation, on the basis of changes in support for each of these types of union attitude in the two cities, that business unionism sentiments were of more importance for explaining the willingness to join a union. Controlling on these two predictors, the anti-strikebreaking measure has little effect on willingness to join. Furthermore, the effects of age (less likely to join) and current unemployment (more likely to join) remain statistically significant after the addition of these three attitudinal measures to the equation. However, the other variables which had accounted for a significant amount of the variation in latent unionism are now of little consequence.

DISCUSSION

Returning to our original research questions, we conclude that there is little evidence of growing support for negative "big labour" opinions about unions in these two communities. However, our analysis of 1987 attitudes about "business unionism" reveals an interesting reversal. In 1981, Winnipeg residents were significantly more likely to agree that unions looked after the wage and job security concerns of their members. In 1987, Edmonton residents were signficantly more likely to

Table IV: Willingness to join a union @: effects of union attitudes and other variables #.

Dependent variable: "Would you join a union if one existed in your workplace or in your profession?" [Yes = 3; Yes, if compulsory = 2; No = 1]

Independent variable	Beta	b	st. error	T		r ^
Edmonton resident (yes = 1)	.061	.112	.097	1.15	*	.056
Age	-.183	-.015	.004	-3.45		-.221
Education level	.144	.057	.022	2.61		.098
Managerial/professional occupation (yes = 1)	-.152	-.316	.114	-2.78		-.160
Unemployed (yes = 1)	.150	.405	.143	2.84		.159
Vote PC provincially	-.146	-.306	.110	-2.77		-.159
[Constant]		2.040				
N = 342 Adjusted R2 = .111						
"Business unionism" index	.419	.392	.049	8.01		.530
"Big labour" index	-.256	-.247	.051	-4.82		-.437
"Management should be prohibited from hiring strike-breakers ..."	-.080	-.054	.035	-1.57	*	.216
Edmonton resident (yes = 1)	.008	.014	.087	0.17	*	.036
Age	-.125	-.011	.004	-2.64		-.221
Education level	.026	.011	.020	0.52	*	.098
Managerial/professional occupation (yes = 1)	-.075	-.154	.100	-1.54	*	-.160
Unemployed (yes = 1)	.109	.290	.125	2.33		.159
Vote PC provincially	-.054	-.112	.100	-1.13	*	-.159
[Constant]		2.087				
N = 310 Adjusted R2 = .372						

@ Labour force members (full-time and part-time workers, and the unemployed) not currently a member of a union or a professional association.

\# Other independent variables used in regression analyses, and then dropped from the equations because of non-significant net effects, are discussed in the text.

* Partial regression coefficient is NOT statistically significant ($p > .01$); all other effects are significant at the .01 level (execpt effect of unemployment in the second equation where $p = .02$).

^ Zero-order correlation; pair-wise deletion of missing cases (unlike regression results where list-wise deletion was used)

agree with such sentiments. This community difference remains even after the introduction of a series of individual-level control variables into the regression analysis. The reversal in opinion is supported by a noticeable change in latent unionism. In 1981, a higher proportion of eligible Winnipeg labour force members stated that they would join a union if one were available. By 1987, Edmonton showed a higher degree of latent unionism.

We interpret these community differences as a reflection of the economic downturn and continued high levels of unemployment in Edmonton. A larger proportion of 1987 Edmonton residents (compared to 1981 Edmonton residents or 1987 Winnipeg residents) may have personally experienced financial difficulties as a result of the recession, or may have known others who did. Such experiences could have a positive influence on opinions about the monetary or job security benefits of union membership. But given what we already know about the complexity and potential contradictory nature of beliefs about unions, it should not surprise us that economic hard times have less effect on "big labour" beliefs or on opinions about the need for anti-strikebreaking legislation. Thus many union supporters, and many potential members, might consciously extoll the economic benefits of membership while at the same time believing that unions are too powerful. Views that may seem contradictory to the industrial relations scholar may, in fact, be fairly compatible in the minds of the public.

Factors other than the economic recession may have influenced the changes in public opinion observed in these two cities. As noted earlier, Edmonton has experienced a number of high-profile industrial disputes and, in the political arena, 11 of the 16 provincial ridings in the city have been represented by the New Democratic Party in the provincial legislature since 1986. In contrast, industrial relations and politics in Winnipeg have been marked by relative stability over this six year span. [11] While it is clear that the economic recession itself precipitated some of the labour disputes (and possibly the left-ward shift in voting patterns), this study cannot conclusively untangle the effects of economic, political, and industrial relations factors on public opinion about unions. For

[11]The Manitoba provincial election in spring, 1988, saw the New Democratic government replaced by a minority Conservative government. Thus, the trend in the province and in the city of Winnipeg appears to be to the political right, whereas the 1986 Alberta provincial election was the first left-ward swing in voting in that province, particularly in the city of Edmonton.

that matter, some of the change in Edmonton may also be a result of selective out-migration over the past few years. If the most entrepreneurial (and least collectively-oriented) residents of the city left because of the recession, pro-union attitudes could become more common. However, even here, the evidence points back to a changing economic climate as the key causal agent.

The Gainers strike is perhaps the best symbol of what we perceive as a changing industrial relations climate in Edmonton that did not have a parallel in Winnipeg. However, our results do not support the hypothesis that the well-publicized violence associated with the use of replacement workers in the Gainers dispute led to more support for anti-strikebreaking legislation in Edmonton in 1987 compared to 1981. Yet media research suggests that the content of news about unions and industrial relations can reinforce or change the views of certain segments of the public (see, for example, Curran and Wingate, 1987; Kiecolt and Sayles, 1988; Cohen and Young, 1981). Indeed, probing this issue further, we discovered some evidence of a media effect in our Edmonton data. Specifically, we found a weak but statistically significant positive association between time spent watching television and agreement with the statement that during a strike management should be prohibited from hiring strikebreakers. [12] While this single small finding probably raises more questions than it answers, it is clear that the issue of media influences on public attitudes about unions constitutes an important research agenda in its own right.

On a more general note, this study underscores the contribution community studies can make to our understanding of union attitudes. Compared to studies of individual workplaces, community surveys provide us with a means of assessing opinions and preferences of the larger population. Public opinion, for example, can have an influence on labour legislation. Moreover, research into support for unionism within communities can provide union organizers with valuable information for planning future organizing drives. Finally, community studies provide a clear advantage over national public

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[12] Controlling on age and education (because older individuals and the less educated tend to watch more television), the partial correlation between amount of television watched and support for prohibitions against strikebreaking was .155 (N = 436). Partial correlations between television viewing and the other four union attitude items were much smaller and non-significant, with one exception. Responses to the statement about "the selfishness of employers can only be fought by strong unions" were significantly associated with TV viewing (partial correlation = .112; N = 431). The television viewing question was not asked in the Winnipeg survey, so across-city comparisons are not possible.

opinion polls when it comes to interpreting trends. Only with knowledge of the local economic, political, and industrial relations -- past and present -- can we begin to understand why shifts in union attitudes might occur, and why some types of beliefs about unions are more pervasive than others.

Our multi-variate findings document more conclusively the community effect on "business unionism" beliefs which we have discussed above. They also show that voting preferences are consistently associated with union attitudes. Future research could fruitfully explore this link between political orientations and union attitudes, as Johnston and Ornstein (1985), among others, have begun to do. While those voting "left" are more supportive of unions, the relatively small effects of voting preference on union attitudes suggest a more complex process. Recognizing that the causal direction might be reversed, this weak relationship also explains why union support has failed to materialize at the ballot box in many Canadian elections.

The multi-variate analyses show a small effect of age, education, and income on specific types of union attitudes, but few other important net effects. The low explained variance is consistent with research on political values, beliefs about inequality and welfare, and related topics (see, for example, Kluegel, 1987). This state of affairs might reflect basic difficulties in measuring political and social values or attitudes. Alternatively, it could mean that surveys have not directly measured the underlying factors which influence such beliefs. In other words, our theoretical model of the sources of variation in union attitudes should be broadened to include the personal experiences which individuals have had with unions, their socialization regarding collective bargaining through family or friends who are union members, and the political ideologies expresssed in their families, schools, workplaces and communities. These are important shaping influences which, if carefully studied, could advance our understanding of union-related attitudes and behaviours.

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